CLAIMS

I claim:

1. A freight management method, based on shipping data and carrier data supplied by a shipper and a carrier, respectively, the method comprising:

creating a request for bids by receiving and storing information for shipping a load, offering equipment, selling a product, or providing a service;

inputting into a computer system the request for bids, and generating in response thereto, an invitation to bid;

the computer system then electronically inputting the invitation to bid to a shipper bulletin board from which the shipper can access the request for bids and the invitation to bid;

electronically transmitting the invitation to bid from the computer system to at least one of a plurality of carriers that have been selected according to carrier qualifications defined by the shipper;

the system also electronically inputting the invitation to bid onto a carrier bulletin board having information on other loads to allow the carrier to access information on a plurality of loads;

electronically transmitting from a carrier a submitted bid or rate, which indicates that the required equipment for the load is available to the shipper;

electronically receiving a bid or rate at the computer system from at least one of the carriers;

electronically transmitting to the shipper a bid report with bids or rates received from a least one of the carriers receiving the invitation to bid;

electronically receiving from the shipper a selection of at least one of the bids or rates in the bid report;

electronically transmitting to the shipper carrier profile information of the corresponding carrier selected by the shipper; and

electronically transmitting to the carrier as shipper's acceptance of the carrier's bid or rate.

2. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein the shipper requests for bids, rates and communication (RFB) includes but is not limited to items as load descriptions with commodity; shipper load ID; load weight and number of units; times being shipped; maximum carrier bid or rate; method of matching carriers to view load (qualified, affiliated, open, etc.); last accepted bid or rate date and time; date and time until which carrier must hold bid or rate, pallet exchange and number of pallets; origin and destination cities, states, countries, zip code; preferred pick-up and delivery dates and times with earlier and/or later timeframes; intermediate stops; carrier requirements including load type, transit mode, interlining, communication, hazardous license, team drivers, driver assist, minimum cargo insurance; equipment requirements including if supplied by shipper, class, type, trailer length, trailer height, trailer width; additional information box allows basic or very complete further descriptions, directions, addresses, telephone numbers, load and loading information, etc.; and

wherein the complete request for bids, rates and communication (RFB) includes the foregoing and in addition, includes but is not limited to, items as additional countries, union or non-union,carrier area, carrier type, carrier annual revenue, carrier class, carrier size, on-time delivery rating, damage free delivery rating, special services, Dun & Bradstreet with CCA rating, Moody's rating, Standard & Poors rating, Department of Transportation rating, IATN rating, carrier insurance, Best Company insurance ratings and size, workers compensation, employee liability, van trailer sides, number of trailer wheels, number of trailer axles, extendibles, tandems, doors, lift gate service, number of trailers, heated, sleeper tractor, equipment maintenance, pup, converter dolly, container, straight chassis, age of equipment, carrier load type experience, driver experience, driver driver safety program, drug screening, packaging, load method, size of pieces or pallets,

accident rate, weight of pieces or pallets, NMFC class and density of pieces or pallets, method of securing load, bulk loads, liquid loads, gas loads, NAFTA and Global harmonized tariff schedule, load and count, unload and count, requesting various types of load bids, additional load requirements including mobile storage, warehousing, local pick-up and delivery, break bulk, consolidation, trailer spotting and trailer shuttle; and

wherein RFB's can include more or less than that mentioned in either the simple or complete RFB and/or include other items as requested in individual customized formats; and

wherein the RFB can incorporate U.S. Units or Metric Units of measure as well as a choice of languages.

3. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein creating requests for bids, rates and communication (RFB's) can be developed by revising and/or adding to and/or resubmitting existing saved and/or archived RFB's; and

wherein resubmitting the same RFB to different carriers than on the original submittal lists; and

wherein the system indicates if a RFB has been revised or changed due to an error or new requirement in the original request as opposed to being a new request by adding a letter suffix to the system number. The system automatically adds the suffix number when the shipper indicates error. The carriers then know that the original RFB is no longer valid and to either bid or rate the revised RFB; and

wherein creating a new RFB by revising only a portion of an existing RFB, such as a date or time, saves the shipper time and effort as well as minimizes submittal errors as compared to having to completely fill out a blank format.

4. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein creating numerous requests for bids, rates and communication (RFB's) can be accomplished en masse electronically from existing computer databases within or remote from the central processing system through the use of electronic transfer programs that mine the necessary information or data for the RFB's from the database files, thereby eliminating the need to enter previously developed database information, via keystrokes, into system formats; and

wherein an entire year of freight can be entered into the system for an annualized bid and/or rate; and

wherein the additional information box in the RFB can be used to download entire load and/or loading specifications and instructions from a shippers database remote from the system.

5. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein the request for bids, rates and communication (RFB) is duplicated and transmitted from the central processing system to a third party, to electronically permit specific carrier distribution selection along with or without an initial shipper's distribution for the invitation to bid, rates, and communication (ITB), and/or the ITB for shipping the load is transmitted from the central processing system to a third party, who then communicates the ITB to one or a plurality of their carriers, also included in the database of the central processing system, in location within and/or remote from the central processing system; and

wherein the system indicates when the same ITB from a duplicated RFB is being offered by one or more third parties in addition to the original shipper by adding a number suffix to the system number. An ITB which has been revised or changed as

indicated by a revised or changed RFB in claim 2 as well as being offered by other third parties would have a system number with both a letter and a number suffix; and

wherein the third party is unable to change any data or information of the original RFB except for the distribution list of carriers to receive the resulting ITB; and

wherein the bids and/or rates for a least one of the carriers is electronically received at the central processing system from a third party.

6. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein the step of electronically transmitting invitations for bids and/or rates (ITB) for a plurality of loads from one or more shippers to an individual carrier all accessible to the carrier through the format of a carrier bulletin board.

7. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein the step of electronically transmitting to the shipper one or a plurality of bids and/or rates which have been received from at least one or a plurality of the carriers respectively receiving the invitation to bid, rate and communicate, the central processing system then creating a Best 7 Report; and

wherein the system electronically selects in groups of seven the bids and/or rates based on the invitation to bid, rates and communication and ordering the bids and/or rates within said group based on price, the lowest to the highest. Additional group of bids and/or rates including 14, 21, 28, etc. indicating higher values can be viewed if desired.

8. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein the step of electronically transmitting from the shipper one or a plurality of requests for bids, rates and communication (RFB) as submitted by the shipper, one or a plurality of invitations to bid, rate and communicate as transmitted to the carrier(s), best 7 reports created with bids

and/or rates submitted to the shipper by the carriers(s) all accessible to the shipper through the format of a shipper bulletin board; and

wherein the bulletin board alerts the shipper of bids and/or rates submitted by indicating the number of new bids and/or rates submitted for each ITB request.

9. The freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein the individual bulletin boards of the shippers and of the carriers, on open and/or private access networks (PAN), any one of which may have separate master bulletin boards combining selected shippers' and/or carriers' bulletin boards, are all part of a system grand master bulletin board. One bulletin board might have eight columns, whereas another bulletin board might have twenty columns along with customized titles, yet they all can communicate with each other through the exchange of data because the grand master board has an unlimited number of columns and column headings covering all of the individual system bulletin boards. This allows separate and private networks to function autonomously yet still not lose the all important network to network, site to site communication without having to individually access each separate site, of which there could be thousands with which a company is working, and then re-enter or remember information and data from other sites in an attempt to address business relationships. The development of individually customized unrelated internet sites without seamless connectability will lead away from the true communication opportunities of the internet and end up with an arduous time consuming and frustrating method of business to business communication; and

wherein the grand master bulletin board will be duplicated on multiple sites and at multiple locations all fully integrated and continually updated will the same information

affording system redundancy and site access insuring greater availability and higher speed processing; and

wherein the basic bulletin boards have line item listings including but not limited to information indicating origin cities and states, destination cities and states, pickup and delivery dates and times along with allowable time frames earlier and/or later, number of intermediate stops, type or name of commodity, equipment type and length, load weight, suggested or preferred price for carriage or purchase, shipper and/or carrier load numbers, and system load identification numbers. Additional and customized load information items can be indicated on more complete bulletin boards; and

wherein any and all bulletin boards can be multi-level filtered and/or sorted by individual names, numbers and/or fields and/or by selectively prioritized names, numbers and/or fields; and

wherein any and all bulletin boards can have information saved, archived and/or deleted.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein remote internet sites, systems, networks, and applications integration can be accessed directly through line item link buttons on individual system bulletin boards permitting complete industry services data mining and scalability. The areas to link to include but are not limited to order entry, procurement, tracking, tracing proof of delivery, order visibility, warehouse fulfillment, insurance, billing and financial. Providing a full service freight management approach through one amalgamation of companies and services finally address the needs of the freight transportation industry as never before possible. Process integration both addresses and documents inter-application and user communications, allowing the

transfer and interrelating of data regardless of computer languages or infrastructure; and

wherein individual bulletin board line item link buttons directly access other shipper and carrier member sites' item information eliminating the need to address each individual internet web site which could number in the thousands for larger shippers and carriers(i.e.: An individual carrier's tracking, tracing proof of delivery data relative to the particular load that has been awarded to that carrier.); and

wherein individual bulletin board line item link buttons directly access other internet application service providers sites item information on the service providers system providing a full freight transportation management logistics solution through one site.(i.e.: an internet application service providers system data on tracking, tracing, proof of delivery relative to the particular load.); and

wherein individual bulletin board line item link buttons directly access other service provider application programs being used by the application providers' shippers and/or carriers. In all cases each system's numbering identifiers will be tracked through the integration process allowing one load, etc. to have multiple numbers including shipper, carrier, service provider, system and network numbers.

11. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein likened to a load, equipment can be entered into the system with similar qualifications and descriptions that are afforded load information. This allows carriers to advertise their available equipment to shippers and carriers along with pertinent requirements including price. The request for rates, bids and communication (RFB) for equipment is filled out with the following exception: The origin city and the destination city incorporate a prefix such as EQUIP/ followed by a state: A carrier can denote that anywhere in a state is

acceptable.

(i.e.: origin EQUIP/MILWAUKEE, WI - destination EQUIP/CHICAGO, IL) or

(i.e.: origin EQUIP/MILWAUKEE, WI - destination EQUIP/ANYWHERE, IL) or

(i.e.: origin EQUIP/ANYWHERE, WI - destination EQUIP/CHICAGO, IL) or

(i.e.: origin EQUIP/ANYWHERE, WI - destination EQUIP/ANYWHERE, IL); and

wherein the freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein likened to a load, leasing or renting of equipment can be indicated with an origin and destination city prefix such as LEASE/ or RENT/. The RFB with its additional information area will completely address the offering; and

wherein the freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein likened to a load, multiple delivered loads can be entered into the system and indicated with an origin and destination city prefix as MULTI/. The RFB also indicates the multiple delivery nature of the request and supplies the required additional information; and

wherein the freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein likened to a load, groups of loads can be entered into the system and indicated with an origin and destination city prefix as GROUP/. The RFB with its additional information area will completely address the request; and

wherein the freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein likened to a load, tours can be entered into the system and indicated with an origin and destination city prefix as TOUR/. The RFB with its additional information area will completely address the request. This allows shippers and carriers to offer complete tours or if needing one or more legs of a tour to be combined with the one or more legs already established to address circuitous routing and return both the carriers equipment and driver

to the point of origin; and

wherein the freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein likened to a load, products can be entered into the system and indicated with an origin city prefix as PROD/ and the destination city box used for the products description (i.e.: origin PROD/MILWAUKEE, WI - destination "NAME" TOMATO SOUP, 24/8 OZ). The RFB with its additional information area will completely address the request. This option addresses products on the open market, special offerings or through diverting; and

wherein the freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein likened to a load, warehousing can be entered into the system and indicated with an origin city prefix as WARE/ and the destination city box used for the warehouse description (i.e.: origin WARE/MILWAUKEE, WI - destination 250,000 SQ FT, HEATED, 20 FT HGT). The RFB with its additional information area will completely address the offering; and

wherein the freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein likened to a load, other services can be entered into the system and indicated with an origin city prefix as SERV/ or other descriptive abbreviation and the destination city box used to describe the service. The RFB with its additional information area will completely address the requirement of the service; and

wherein as an alternative or an addition to the above, a separate column on the bulletin boards can be incorporated to indicate equipment, leasing or renting, multiple loads, group loads, tours, products, warehousing and other services as opposed to a load request.

12. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein generally on the open systems the invitations for bids, rates and communication (ITB) electronically

transmitted to the carriers and the Best 7 reports transmitted to the shippers do not indicate the identity of the shippers and the carriers respectively thereby allowing anonymity of each and requiring selections to be based on individual qualifications and price while protecting both the shippers and carriers from being taken advantage by unfair participants.

13. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein generally on the private systems or private access networks (PAN) the invitations for bids, rates and communication (ITB) electronically transmitted to the carrier and the Best 7 reports transmitted to the shipper do indicate the identity of the shippers and the carriers respectively as the participants are already associated with or contracted to each other, thereby eliminating the need for anonymity.

14. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein a third party can initially submit a bid to a shipper of $0.00 or use a decline button indicating that for whatever reason the request has been reviewed but has been declined, so that the shipper should submit the request to another carrier(s) or the third party can initially bid $1.00 or use an accept button to indicate that the reviewed request will be handled and that the final bid and/or rate will be forthcoming, so that the shipper will not have to submit the request to another carrier.

15. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein bids by carriers for re-locating empty containers can be positive dollar amounts, zero ($0.00) or negative dollar amounts which would indicate that the carrier would pay the shipper to move the empty container. A negative bid might well be submitted when the carrier can use the empty container as temporary additional equipment for moving the carrier's freight

during the re-location process, to insure that the carrier was awarded the empty container over competitive carrier bids.

16. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein the request for bids, rates and communication (RFB), and/or the invitation to bid, rate and communicate (ITB), and/or the rates and/or bids (Best 7) are received from the shipper and/or carrier as a facsimile data files and are converted using an optical character recognition program. This recognition program reads the data that has been placed on system sheet that are then faxed to the central processing system that then places these received formats on a computer screen being viewed by an operator. The program stops if there appears to be an error or if the program cannot understand the markings. The operator manually intervenes, and the program then continues. The data is then entered into the next step to be performed by the central processing system in the same manner as if the data had been electronically sent from a computer filled out format. There are multiple sheet types covering all aspects of a request for bids, rates and communication (RFB). The invitation to bid, rate and communicate (ITB) is then sent to those requesting it. There is one sheet type for bidding and/or rating an ITB. This optical character recognition option allows those not on the internet or having computer capabilities to participate in the system.

17. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein the request for bids, rates and communication (RFB), and/or the invitation to bid, rate and communicate (ITB), and/or the bids and/or rates (Best 7) are received over the Internet.

18. The freight management method of claim 1, wherein the request for bids, rates and communication (RFB), and/or the invitation to bid, rate and communicate (ITB), and/or the bids and/or rates are received in a data file via e-mail.

19. The freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein the request for bids, rates and communication (RFB) and/or the bids and/or rates submitted from the ITB's are created through interactive voice response (IVR).

20. The freight management method and system of claim 1, further comprising the step of inputting carrier profile data into a database wherein the carrier data includes carrier identification data, carrier contact data, carrier service area data (states, provinces, countries), carrier intermodal capabilities data (truck, rail air, ship), load type services data (TL, LTL, CL, LCL), carrier type data, carrier annual revenue data, carrier employee size data, carrier on-time and damage-free delivery ratings data, carrier equipment data (type, length, width, height, sides, shape, wheels, axles, doors, heated, lift gate, extendibles, tandems, etc.), special services data, carrier commodities hauled data, carrier financial condition data, hazardous license data, carrier driver data, carrier insurance data, carrier rules and charges data, carrier list of corporations or individuals for which they will not provide carriage data, etc.

21. The freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein the request for bids, rates and communication (RFB) may include carrier profile requirements such as all, part of but not limited to carrier requirement data as listed in item 15; and

wherein the invitation to bid, rates and communication (ITB) can be sent to a shipper's list of carriers regardless of any specific qualifications; and

wherein the invitation to bid, rates and communication (ITB) can be prepared by matching data in the request for bids and/or rates with carrier data previously input to the central system to develop a group of qualified carriers to receive the invitation to bid and/or rates; and

wherein the ITB may also be prepared by matching the above carrier data in the order of the data's importance or preference as directed by the shipper.

22. The freight management method and system of claim 1, further comprising the step of inputting shipper profile data into a database wherein the shipper data includes shipper identification data, shipper contact data, shipper annual revenue, shipper employee size, shipper financial data, shipper freight department data (in-house, third party logistics company (3PL), broker), shipper list of corporations or individuals for which they will not offer requests for carriage data, etc.

23. The freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein the invitation to bid, rate and communicate (ITB) may include shipper profile requirements such as but not limited to the shipper requirement data as listed in item 17.

24. The freight management method and system of claim 1, wherein the central processing system includes at least one central processing unit, memory for storing a database of shipper profile data and carrier profile data along with all of the individual load, equipment, product, services and the resulting transactional process and system, network, site integration data, and a communication interface to the Internet.

25. The method and system of claim 1, wherein the central processing system and/or database is located on, allowing greater real time processing and/or remote from the internet.

26. The method and system of claim 1, wherein individual bulletin boards, RFB's, ITB's, Best 7's, etc. can be customized to the requirements of the shippers and/or carriers. The names, logos and look and feel of the sites, the number of columns, the column heading names, the format boxes' titles, the specific content can all be revised to

the specification of the individual users. Very importantly, the shipper and carrier sites will appear to be their own as the system supplies the engine running the sites behind the scenes. While such customization provides the necessary image needs and control projected to their individual clients, all functional aspects and electronic relationships between shippers and carriers and services entities using the system through the individual bulletin boards, the master bulletin boards and the grand master bulletin board remain the same.

27. The method of claim 1, wherein multiple screens can be viewed simultaneously on one computer screen permitting the matching of loads and/or equipment and/or tours and/or products and/or services (including but not limited to warehousing, leasing, renting, financial) to optimize the relationships of and between any and/or all of the of these areas; and

wherein one bulletin board would filter and sort for loads (both individual, multiple and backhauls to maximize consolidation and reduce bids and/or rates), one for available equipment (optimizing equipment use to reduce costs), one for tours (enabling circuitous routing permitting both equipment and drivers to complete a route back to the point of origin), one for products (indicating products offered for sale outright or as in diverting), one for each of the various services such as warehousing (a destination for some of the products or load requests). This multi area relational viewing capability due to the master bulletin board concept allows shippers, carriers, vendors, product and service suppliers to all maximize the effect of their offerings.

28. The method of claim 1, wherein shippers and carriers can be included on may shipper and/or carrier member lists on individual private access

networks and/or systems, each requiring individual member numbers and authorization codes. For some this could include hundreds of separate bulletin boards. To consolidate viewing to one bulletin board with name identification for individual shipper and/or carrier reference and to simplify site accessibility, shipper and carrier master numbers and master authorization codes will automatically address access through all of the numerous individual member's numbers and authorization codes and sites enabling easy system wide information availability.

29. A freight management system for arranging for shipment of a load from a shipper by a carrier, based on shipping data and carrier data supplied by the shipper and the carrier, respectively, the system comprising:

a central processing system;

means for inputting into the central processing system a request for bids from the shipper for shipping a load;

means for electronically transmitting an invitation to bid for shipping the load from the central processing system to a plurality of carriers;

means for electronically receiving bids at the central processing system from at least some of the carriers for shipping the load;

means for electronically transmitting to the shipper a bid report with bids received from at least some of the carriers receiving the invitation to bids; and

means for electronically receiving from the shipper a bid selection of at least one of the bids.

30. The freight management system of claim 29, wherein the central processing system includes at least one central processing unit and a communication interface to the Internet.

31. The freight management system of claim 29, wherein the central processing system includes at least one central processing unit, a memory for storing a database of shipper profile data and carrier profile data, and a communication interface to the Internet.

32. A freight management method for arranging for shipment of a load from a shipper by a carrier, based on shipping data and carrier data supplied by the shipper and the carrier, respectively, the method comprising:

inputting into the central processing system a request for bids from the shipper for shipping the load;

electronically transmitting an invitation to bid for shipping the load from the central processing system to a plurality of carriers;

electronically receiving bids at the central processing system from at least some of the carriers for shipping the load;

electronically transmitting to the shipper a bid report with bids received from at least some of the carriers receiving the invitation to bids; and

electronically receiving from the shipper a bid selection of at least one of the bids.

33. The method of claim 32, further comprising the step of responding to the bid selection by electronically transmitting a name and a phone number of the corresponding one of the carriers to the shipper.

34. The method of claim 32, wherein

the invitation to bid is first transmitted from the central processing system to a third party, who then communicates the invitation to bid to a plurality of carriers in locations remote from the central processing system; and

wherein the bids for at least some of the carriers are electronically received at the central processing system from the third party.

35. The method of claim 32, wherein the step of electronically transmitting an invitation to bid further includes electronically transmitting invitations for bids for a plurality of loads to an individual carrier.

36. The method of claim 32, wherein the step of electronically transmitting to the shipper a plurality of bids further includes electronically transmitting to the shipper bids for a plurality of loads from a plurality of carriers.